



# SEWEE VOLUNTEER NEWSLETTER



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Newsletter edited by Bill Denig

## A SPECIAL THANK YOU FROM JULIE

I would like to thank all our volunteers that made the 2006-2007 school year happen. Without our volunteers teaching some lessons and providing support, we wouldn't be able to operate! Thanks to you, we have taught over 8,000 children this past school year and over 1,000 so far this summer. Whether you have led some of our Environmental Education programs, helped clean up the mess after the little ones left, or inventoried and organized education supplies, your contribution is greatly appreciated. I look forward to



working with you to make the 2007-2008 school year even more exciting at Sewee!

Julie Binz

## THE REFUGE YEAR IN REVIEW

Many changes have taken place at Cape Romain NWR since the last newsletter was published. The first major project to discuss is the refurbishing of the Dominick House on Bulls Island. The house was built in 1928, prior to the refuge's establishment, and was donated to the refuge in 1936, four years after its creation. The house survived Hugo in 1989 but was in dire need of repairs. Thanks to the generous allocation of funds by Former Senator Hollings and deferred maintenance funds within the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the house recently received a \$700,000. face lift. If you did not see the house before the refurbishment or, if you had not seen it since, you

may not comprehend the magnitude of the project. The interior and exterior of the house was painted, floors were replaced or refurbished, paneling was replaced with dry wall, a new roof was put on, all electrical and plumbing was replaced, new central heating and air conditioning was installed, and new furniture and cabinetry was installed. Now that the house is completely refurbished the plan is to have the house available for weekend duty, and a retreat for special USFWS meetings and for other conservation groups. Future plans are to convert one of the rooms into an inter-

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*(The Refuge Year In Review, Continued from page 1)*

pretive area that features the history of the house, island, and natural history of the area. As fate would have it, almost immediately after completing the work on the house the Island's well literally went dry. For about 2 weeks the island was without water until a new well could be drilled. The new well is about 230 feet deep equipped with a reverse osmosis filtration sys-



**The Dominick House Today**

tem and ozone regenerator system that will make the water in the Dominick House potable.

Again, in part, through the financial help of Former Senator Hollings several water control structures on Bulls Island were replaced. The first rice trunk was installed on Jacks Creek and another placed at Upper Summerhouse Pond. Three metal stop logs were also installed at pools 1, 2, and 3. The ditches were cleaned and re-dug on both Upper and Lower Summerhouse Ponds, Beach Road, and fire break 4. The water control structures were installed to improve our ability to manage water levels on Bulls Island without someone having to "baby-sit" them all of the time. Our efforts have been rewarded this year with excellent stands of wild millet (aka. duck food) in all of the interior ponds. We will know more on how

we did once we conduct vegetation studies this fall prior to the arrival of waterfowl. Jacks Creek is also starting to rebound with large areas of wigeon grass. This will continue to improve as we get rainfall into the impoundments which will in turn reduce the water salinity levels within the impoundments. Additionally, 5 culverts were installed under fire break 4 to improve the hydrology and an emergency dike was built near the beach to protect Jacks Creek from further erosion.

If you have ever been to Bulls Island you are familiar with the area where all of our maintenance equipment was stored. Pretty it was not but now it is no more. Thanks to hurricane damage funds a new pole shed was constructed behind the Dominick House and the old maintenance area was completely demolished and removed. The new shed is 96' x 24' with a cement floor work area and enclosed tool room. This will provide the staff with a better work area and also, it helps to move all the equipment out of the sight of our visiting public.

The staff dock area on Bulls Island was upgraded with longer pilings and a wider dock area thanks to funds from a storm damage account. The public dock is still in need of repairs but will not be addressed until other funds can be secured.

A grant, resulting from restitution from an oil spill, made the removal of an invasive species know as Chinese Tallow possible. Treatment of all tallow within a 200 acre area between Lighthouse Road and Beach Road to the beach is nearly complete. It is being handled by contractors and volunteers. Other funding has also helped in the removal of cattails, through spraying, in all the ponds on Bulls Island. This was followed up by disking in several of the water bodies.

Ray Pattera

## CAPE ROMAIN EXCURSIONS

There's no better way to learn about Cape Romain than to get out to the refuge islands and that's just what we did! On May 21<sup>st</sup>, volunteers met Tricia, Julie and Refuge Project Leader Donny Browning at the Sewee Center to view a presenta-

tion on Bulls Island history. After the presentation, everyone boarded the pontoon boat and headed for Bulls. We toured the island from one end to the other looking for birds, fox squirrels and other wildlife, stopped at *Alligator Alley* to photograph those huge ancient reptiles peering up at us from the pond, and took a

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(Cape Romain Excursions; Continued from page 2)  
step back in time at Old Fort. The refuge manages habitat for migratory waterfowl and we checked out the new rice trunks used for manag-

ing water levels in the ponds. Along the way, we looked at native plants as well as the invasive Chinese Tallow (popcorn tree) the refuge is

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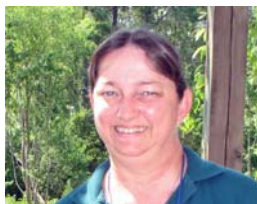
## VOLUNTEERS...MAKING A DIFFERENCE



David Shuckstes



Al Beaulieu



Pat McCormack



Dan Billen



Eric Shea



Ervin Ashley



Bill Denig



Leslie Poston



Randy Lynch



Andrea Santos



John Vogel



Carin Pavlinchak



Coni Dudley



Audrey Temelini

"We couldn't do it without you!" What are our volunteers doing that enable us to manage and maintain our precious resources, provide quality information services for refuge and forest visitors, and promote conservation education for our youth? Lots!!

Volunteers continue to work tirelessly to recover and monitor loggerhead sea turtles nests; in June, 30 volunteers donated 405 hours in support of our nest recovery efforts. Twenty-three volunteers donated 414 hours of service for the Sewee Center and refuge in June. Volunteers work with children of all ages, presenting "hands-on" conservation programs such as animals and their tracks, reptiles and endangered red wolves. As hikers, bikers, kayakers, campers and sightseers arrive at the Center, volunteers supply the recreationists with trail guides and safety tips and send them in the right direction. Volunteers man the book store, compile education packets, maintain data spreadsheets and create graphic designs for interpretive panels. Our volunteers have repaired boardwalks, built an interpretive kiosk and pergola, put up shelving, refurbished boats, cleared the wolf enclosure, cleaned up the beach and mowed grass.

Our needs are ongoing and the support we receive from volunteers is invaluable. Our volunteers make a world of difference! We are grateful for their hard work, conservation ethic and commitment to join us in protecting our resources.

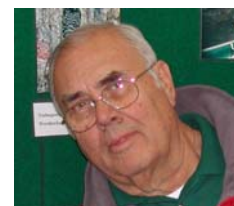
Patricia Lynch



Jeff Smith



Neil White



Bob Morris

## A NEW DAY AT SEWEE CENTER

I wonder what we will do today? I ask that question each day I go to do my volunteer work at the SEWEE Center. I chose to volunteer for the Center after reading a very well written article in the local paper describing the beneficial things performed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the US Forest Service personnel there, and asking for volunteers. But I had no idea I would be called upon to perform such a wide variety of tasks. My first assignment was as a receptionist at the Center facility on Hwy 17. After receiving my handbook and a short training session from "Ranger" Trish, I was now ready to greet visitors and provide them with information, pamphlets, maps, etc to help them enjoy the wonderful nature that exists here in the South Carolina Low Country. In addition to being the receptionist over the next few weeks, I helped with a youth "Career Days" activity, worked on automating the office volunteer data base, removed unsightly weeds from the "Red Wolf" den, and cleaned and organized the Headquarters garage area. I hardly got to learn where everything was located at the Center when I was asked to help the maintenance team at Cape Romain Wildlife Refuge where I enjoyed meeting and working with Wayne and Greg. We would work on so many different activities either at the Cape Romain area or Bull's Island. Each week I would arrive not knowing what was in store for the day. Neil (another volunteer) and I worked on building storage areas and shelves, putting new drywall in the ceiling, rebuilding a Boston Whaler, cleaning out old storage areas, building guard rails around a rice "trunk" (dam), and repairing equipment. Where else can you get to ride an ATV around Bull's Island to fetch tools and equipment? We solved water pumping problems, equipment malfunction problems and continually found "work-arounds" to keep things going at Bull's. I helped an Americorps Youth Group clean up miles of beach on Bulls Island removing a dump truck load of garbage that we humans had dumped into the Atlantic Ocean. In between these assigned tasks, I was asked to help do some major construction projects as well. I became very adept at cutting and assem-

bling major wood pieces for a kiosk at Bull's Island and a pagola at the Center. Part of that challenge was working in 90+ degrees heat with little shade. And each day on the Islands was accentuated by the lovely boat rides in the early morning (quiet, peaceful, serene) and evenings (windy and bumpy). We would experience high and low tides where one low tide (due to wind and tides) made the refuge looks like a wet lunar landscape. One Island adventure was to Cape Island where we cut a wide path (using "weed eaters") to the lighthouses for a special tour outing. Forgetting my waders in my truck, I had to be carried by one of the rangers through the plough mud to dry land. I also experienced the amazing efforts of government employees and volunteers associated with protecting loggerhead sea turtles here in South Carolina. We would boat out from McClellanville in the early hours and spend the day riding the beach in an ATV searching for "turtle crawls", checking and marking nests and relocating nests if necessary. I marveled at the dedicated people who did this very tough task day after day.

My friends ask me why I would work so hard, as a volunteer. "I am not sure", I tell them but I do enjoy it. Maybe it is the idea that you are doing something good, that someone has got to do it, that they need me, maybe it is the wonderful people I have met and work with... All I know is that even though I come home dog tired, I really enjoy the day helping out. I volunteered for the SEWEE Center to keep my self active and use my physical and mental skills in my retirement years. I just had no idea that the activities would be so varied, so interesting and so much fun. I recommend it highly to anyone who is retired, wants to have fun and contribute to the well being of our beautiful natural world here in SC.

Dave Shuckstes



## A CRUISE OF THE WHITE NIGHTS OF RUSSIA

We arrived in St. Petersburg just a week before the longest day of the year. Sunrise was 4:30 AM and sunset was 11:30 PM!

St. Petersburg is situated on 100 plus islands; everywhere there are canals and bridges with beautifully designed iron fences and protection. Buildings are painted bright colors, with the Heritage Museums six buildings in bright green and white with gold trim.

Bunkers still stand that mark the WWII siege line of the city, formerly known as Leningrad. Driving across this line was a very moving experience as I recalled how little our lives changed here in the states during the war.

We spent a week on shipboard going on the Neva and Volga Rivers and across the largest lake in Europe, Lake Ladoga at 6,700 square miles! As we traveled from St. Petersburg to Moscow, we saw beautiful green countryside with a variety of conifers and other trees and went through 18 locks to accommodate the river levels. We

stopped each day to visit a village or small town, seeing many Russian Orthodox churches, each more spectacular than the last! Services at these churches can last 2-3 hours, with everyone standing, regardless of your age or status. Not even the czar gets to sit down!

On board the ship we had classes, lectures and demonstrations to familiarize us with the country and its culture. The dining room, food and service were excellent, as were the evening concerts by young conservatory musicians.

Moscow had golden domes and potted flowers but still felt dreary when compared to St. Petersburg. The people didn't smile and were rude, pushing and shoving in crowds. The city has many forms of public transportation including trackless trolley cars, buses, vans, taxis and the metro, located more than 650 feet underground! Visits included the Kremlin, Red Square and a folk dance program that was more like a ballet with elegant costuming. Trained cats and acrobats made the circus a memorable occasion.

Coni Dudley

*(Cape Romain Excursions; Continued from page 3)*

working to eradicate. After a leisurely lunch on the screened-in porch at the Dominick House, we had a great time sitting on the beach enjoying the sea breeze and beach combing before we headed back to the mainland.

On June 20<sup>th</sup>, Matt Connolly, Refuge Manager took us out to tour the waterways and visit other refuge islands. Along the way, Matt talked to us about the Class I Wilderness designation, the state regulated waters, rail hunting and fishing and talked about the importance of the refuge for resting and nesting areas for so much of our bird life. A highlight of our trip was going to Marsh Island where we saw brown pelicans and terns nesting. It was an incredible sight and sure stirred up feelings of awe, hitting us with the realization of how small and fragile the island was, a tiny spit of land so significant for these birds. From Marsh Island we headed to White Banks but, due to the shallow water and shoals, we turned back and set our course for Raccoon Key. We beached at Raccoon Key, had lunch and got out to stretch our legs and do some shelling. Upon leaving the island, we discovered that we wouldn't be able to continue to

Lighthouse and Cape islands and have enough gas to make it back to Garriss Landing. We headed back, stopping at Buck Hall for a break and to meet Ray, who brought gas for our return trip. We docked at Garriss just as it began to rain.

Patricia Lynch

## VOLUNTEER LIGHTHOUSE TOUR

Our volunteer Lighthouse Tour will be on **Sunday, November 4th**. We will meet at the Sewee Center at 11:30 am for a historical slide presentation by our guide, Tommy Graham. After the presentation, we will car caravan to the McClellanville boat landing, board the Island Cat Ferry at 1 pm and head out to Lighthouse Island. Along the way, Tommy will talk about how the refuge islands and creeks have changed over

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## A MESSAGE FROM THE SEWEE ASSOCIATION

The SEWEE Association works in partnership with the National Wildlife Refuges and Forest along the coast of South Carolina. This includes Francis Marion National Forest, Cape Romain, Waccamaw and Ernest F. Hollings ACE Basin National Wildlife Refuges. Our mission is to support these federal partners in their conservation efforts.

During the past year, we have been able to continue our long-running support of the education programs by providing an Educator, Julie Binz, to schedule and coordinate all the programs offered at these sites. Julie relies on you as volunteers to make sure that we are prepared for each group and to provide them with quality programs. The teaching volunteers have been a tremendous asset to our work and we look forward to working with all of you as the school year begins.

The Association has also been able to find grant funding to help our partners with other work

they need to do. Over the years we have provided funds for trail work and interpretive signs. Recently we have been able to provide interns and contractors to help with biological work, including the Loggerhead Sea Turtle Nest Relocation project and eradication of invasive species within Cape Romain. Many of you are involved in these projects, too, so it is the joint work of all of us that is making a difference. We are also working tirelessly with the Waccamaw NWR to facilitate the building of new visitor areas including the Cox Ferry Lake Recreation Area and the new Visitor & Environmental Education Center at Yauhannah in Georgetown County.

Thanks to each of you for the time you give to our partners. In financially lean times, volunteers make all the difference!

Karen Beshears

## NEWS FROM THE TURTLE TEAM

The refuge turtle team braved hot and exhausting work everyday for several months to protect the Loggerhead nests, giving the little ones the best chance they could have for a safe hatch-

ing and trip to the sea. As of early September, 708 nests have been logged on Cape and Lighthouse Islands. It takes a sizable team to persevere this grueling work day after day in the hot summer and together, the volunteers have put in over 2,590 hours!

Funding from both the **Deedee Pascal Barrier Islands Trust Fund** and the **SEWEE Association** have made volunteer staff available to help the core team. In 2005 and 2006, the Trust Fund provided Cape Romain with a part-time (3 days a week) intern. This year, the Trust Fund provided us with two part-time interns, Molly Klarman and Daniel Russo, to help with turtle work on Lighthouse and Bulls Island and work on other wildlife management projects such as posting bird nesting areas, bird nesting surveys, and invasive species eradication. With the additional intern support (over 495 hours), we were able to carry out sea turtle nest surveys and nest protection on all three islands (Bulls, Cape and Lighthouse). This is the first time that nest protection has ever been conducted on Bulls Island and over 90 nests were caged in situ (not moved) or relocated and caged to protect them

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We welcome Gale Vancleave, Denise McKay, Joshua McBee and Dennis Hyatt (left to right) to our Volunteer Team.

## FRANCIS MARION NATIONAL FOREST – A YEAR IN REVIEW

Francis Marion National Forest encompasses more than 250,000 acres throughout Berkeley & Charleston counties. These lands are managed by the USDA Forest Service for multiple uses including watershed protection, timber production, habitat for wildlife and fish species, wilderness area management, minerals leasing, and recreation.

Over 190,000 acres in the forests are managed for timber production, pulpwood and biomass. Biomass refers to pine saplings that are too small for timber or pulpwood production. Since Hurricane Hugo, biomass makes up thousands of acres of the forest. This year 3,000 acres of the young pine stands have been thinned, improving wildlife habitat and reducing the danger of catastrophic wildfire, while providing a local renewable energy source for power plants.

Habitat is being improved throughout the forest for rare and endangered plants such as the pondberry and American chaffseed. Rare plant inventories were completed for 4000 acres on the forest and 150 miles of roads and trails were surveyed for the invasive cogon grass. This year a one-acre hotspot of cogon grass was eradicated from the forest. If you see any, please contact the Extension Office at Clemson University at 864-656-2479, any South Carolina Department of Forestry office or the Department of Plan Industry at 864-646-2130.

Wildlife surveys are an important part of ecosystem management practiced by the Forest Service. This year biologists surveyed over 5,962 acres for Proposed Endangered Threatened and Sensitive Plants (PETS). 725 acres of permanent wildlife openings were managed to provide food and brood areas for songbirds, turkeys, and quail. The Forest Service conducted surveys to establish annual population trends of resident birds, furbearers, frogs, flatwood salamanders, Red-cockaded woodpeckers and migratory birds. 150 acres of waterfowl impoundments were managed to provide winter habitat for over 800 migrating ducks and spring habitat for migrating shorebirds.

An open longleaf pine forest is where the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker lives. Longleaf requires prescribed burning (controlled fires) to eliminate competition and maintain this rare habitat, and this year the Forest Service was able to burn 34,500 acres within this habitat.

The forest provides the public with a diverse set of outdoor recreation opportunities. Whether you enjoy hiking, or riding trails, paddling, fishing, hunting, camping, birding, or simply relaxing at one of our picnic areas, the Francis Marion National Forest has something special waiting for you. A new facility, Awendaw Canoe Launch, opened in April providing access to Awendaw Creek and parking for the Awendaw Passage of the Palmetto Trail. This September, construction will start on replacing the boardwalk on the Sewee Shell Ring Trail (destroyed in the 2005 hurricane season) as well as adding a marsh trail and five interpretive panels. Thanks to the efforts of dedicated volunteers, the Boggy Head Rifle Range has been reopened. The range had been closed to the public since February 8 because of excessive vandalism. The Forest also hosted two youth deer hunts, two disabled deer hunts, and two fishing rodeos, introducing 300 folks to hunting and fishing on the Francis Marion National Forest.

Communities are expanding along the edges of national forest all across the country. These areas, known as the "wildland-urban interface" have been targeted in a recent national campaign known as FIREWISE, a fire prevention education program promoting ways to protect your home from wildfire. Smoky Bear and the Fire Prevention team for the Francis Marion National Forest have been instrumental in involving the public with FIREWISE. The team visits local schools and libraries, spreading the word about fire.

Submitted by Jannah Dupre

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*(Volunteer Lighthouse Tour; Continued from page 5)*

the years (he has old maps). Interpretation will continue on the island - we will be able to go into the 1857 light but won't be climbing the stairs. As ya'll know, the island is part of the wilderness area and there are no facilities and no dock. Wear shoes that you don't mind getting wet or muddy. Pack a lunch and beverages and dress for the weather. We will be heading back to the mainland around 3:30 pm. Plan for a beautiful fall afternoon on the refuge!

*(News From The Turtle Team; Continued from page 6)*  
from raccoons.

The SEWEE Association was awarded a grant in 2006 to support the turtle program. Funding provided the refuge with a full-time intern throughout the season for nest monitoring and relocation and also provided assistance in trapping and removal of raccoons who raid the turtle nests. Michelle Pate was hired by the Association in 2006 as the intern and continued in this position for most of the 2007 season. Michelle was able to lead the turtle team on their daily vigil and helped with the work on Bulls Island in 2007, putting in over 400 hours of labor. Trapping and removal of pesky raccoons from Cape and Lighthouse Islands was the job of master-trapper, Billy Shaw. Billy's work began in early 2005; he eliminated so many raccoons that only 14 nests were cooned that year. The Association brought him back in 2006 and again, his expert work resulted in only 13 cooned nests all season. This year Billy was able to get started prior to the nesting season and his efforts meant that by the end of July, only 2 nests had been disturbed. The Association will continue to fund this work in 2008 and is working to find ways to continue this valuable service to the refuge after that time.



Billy Shaw – photo by Laura Smith

**Turtle Tidbit:** In a somewhat unusual occurrence, the turtle team also discovered a Green Turtle nest on Cape Island on August 15<sup>th</sup>. It was a first for 2007 and one of only a few ever recorded. Verification was by size of the eggs and a distinctive body cavity/crawl by Billy Shaw who has experience with Greens. The ultimate verification will occur at hatching inventory with the hope that we will have visual positive ID. It seems that turtle workers have to be good detectives as well!

Information provided by Jerry Tupacz, Sarah Dawsey, Karen Beshears and Tricia Lynch. Edited by Dave Shuckstes



Michelle Pate (right) & Lauren Billodeaux